

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
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1. [Panetta, Dempsey: U.S.-Iraq Partnership Will Continue](#) (11-15-2011)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Nov. 15, 2011 – Iraq and its forces are prepared to cope with the security challenges they will face after U.S. troops withdraw, Defense Department leaders told Congress today.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, described their views on those challenges in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

“Today, thanks to innumerable sacrifices from all involved, Iraq is governing itself,” Panetta said. “It's a sovereign nation. It's an emerging source of stability in a vital part of the world. And as an emerging democracy, it is capable of addressing its own security needs.”

The secretary said the United States seeks to continue a relationship with Iraq based on mutual respect and interests.

With the State Department set to lead U.S. efforts in Iraq after troops withdraw by Dec. 31, a structure remains that allows the United States to continue assisting the Iraqi government, Panetta said.

The State Department-led Office of Security Cooperation will include a limited number of U.S. military personnel assigned to the embassy, he said, and the U.S.-Iraq strategic framework

agreement provides “a platform for future cooperation in counterterrorism, in naval and air defense, and in joint exercises.”

The secretary said countering extremism, reducing internal friction and closing gaps in the country’s external defense capability will be key challenges for the Iraqi government.

Al-Qaida in Iraq and Iranian-backed militant groups remain capable of planning and carrying out periodic high-profile attacks, Panetta acknowledged. But those groups, he added, lack support among the Iraqi people, and Iraq’s counterterrorism forces are among the most capable in the region.

“We will be in a position to continue to assist them in building these capabilities through our Office of Security Cooperation,” the secretary said.

Conflict among Sunni, Shiia, Kurd and other political blocs likewise will pose a challenge, Panetta said.

“As in any democracy, Iraq deals with a range of competing agendas,” the secretary noted. “But the solutions to these challenges lie in the political -- not the military -- realm.”

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq James Jeffrey and his team, Panetta said, are working with the Iraqis in maintaining dialogue and sustaining cooperation along the Arab-Kurd elements in the north. And Iraqi forces are developing the systems and expertise they’ll need for a robust external defense, the secretary noted, though they will need assistance in this area, including logistics and air defense.

“That will be an important focus of the Office of Security Cooperation,” Panetta said. “The recent decision by the Iraqis to purchase U.S. F-16s, part of a \$7.5 billion foreign military sales program, demonstrates Iraq’s commitment to build up its external defense capabilities and maintain a lasting military-to-military training relationship with the United States.”

Panetta cited Iran’s regional ambitions as another challenge Iraq faces.

“Tehran has sought to weaken Iraq by trying to undermine its political processes and ... by facilitating violence against innocent Iraqi civilians and against American troops,” the secretary said.

Those actions, coupled with Iran’s growing ballistic missile capability and efforts to advance its nuclear program, he added, represent “a significant threat to Iraq, the broader region and U.S. interests.”

The strong and self-reliant Iraq he sees emerging, Panetta said, has no desire to be dominated by Iran or anyone else, and the United States and regional partners are committed to countering Iran’s destabilizing efforts.

“We’ve made very clear that we’re committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons,” the secretary said. “And while we have strengthened our regional security relationship in recent years, Tehran’s destabilizing activities have only further isolated that regime.”

Panetta said the U.S. message to allies, friends and potential adversaries in the Middle East region is clear.

"We have more than 40,000 American troops that remain in the Gulf region; we're not going anywhere," Panetta said. "And we will continue to reassure our partners, deter aggressors and counter those seeking to create instability."

Iraq has come through a difficult period in its history, he said, and it has emerged stronger with a government that is largely representative of, and increasingly responsive to, the needs of its people.

"This outcome was never certain, especially during the war's darkest days," the secretary added. "It is a testament to the strength and resilience of our troops that we helped the Iraqi people reverse a desperate situation, and provided them the time and space to foster the institutions of a representative government."

More than a million Americans served in Iraq. More than 32,000 have been wounded, and nearly 4,500 service members "made the ultimate sacrifice for this mission," Panetta said.

Largely as a result of their efforts, he said, "Iraq is now an independent and sovereign country that can govern and secure itself, and hopefully, make the decisions that are in the interests of its people."

Dempsey told the committee he took command of the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad in June 2003, and nine months later the unit's effort to establish security, develop Iraqi forces, restore services and encourage Iraqis to take control of their own destiny "was at risk."

Dempsey recounted that the division's tour of duty was extended by four months to suppress an uprising in Iraq's southern provinces, and that as commander, he visited most of the organization's smaller units to explain to troops why it was important they remain.

"To their great and everlasting credit, to a man and woman, they recognized the importance of our mission, they embraced the challenge, and they did what their nation asked them to do," Dempsey said. "As I look back, I think I'll remember most the toughness, the resolve and the resilience of America's sons and daughters and their families in those early days. Sometimes ... actually, always, their character shines through in the toughest of times."

Discussion about the future of post-conflict Iraq requires some context, the chairman said.

"In 1991, I left my family to drive Iraq out of Kuwait," the chairman said. "In 2003, I left my family to drive Saddam Hussein out of Baghdad. And in 2011, we're talking about establishing a normal security relationship with Iraq."

The amount of American blood and treasure invested in Iraq has created a bond going forward, Dempsey added. "Our futures are inextricably linked," he said.

The United States must continue to support Iraqi security forces' development and the diplomatic effort to demonstrate commitment to Iraq's nascent democracy, the chairman said.

Dempsey said that while he is concerned about Iraq's future, American forces are "proud to have been part of this effort to provide Iraq the opportunities it now has."

After the troop withdrawal outlined in the 2008 U.S.-Iraq security agreement is complete, the general said, a further series of negotiations will address areas where the United States can continue assistance to Iraq.

“We're eager to be part of the effort to determine how we can continue to partner with them on issues of common interest for the future,” Dempsey said.

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

2. Obama Says Asia-Pacific Region Is Engine for Growth (11-13-2011)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama told business executives from across the Asia-Pacific region November 12 that the United States sees the region “as an extraordinary engine for growth.”

Obama — who is on a nine-day trip that takes him to Hawaii, Australia and Indonesia — said November 12 in Honolulu that the economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum represent nearly half of the world’s trade and half of the world’s output of goods and services. He met with business leaders at the APEC CEO Business Summit before the main meeting of the leaders from the 21 APEC economies on November 13.

After the APEC meetings in Honolulu, Obama travels to Canberra and Darwin to celebrate the 60th year of the U.S.-Australian alliance and to conduct bilateral talks with Australian leaders before attending the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit and the East Asia Summit, both Bali, Indonesia, before returning to Washington on November 20.

“The whole goal of APEC is to ensure that we are reducing barriers to trade and investment that can translate into concrete jobs here in the United States and all around the world,” [Obama told business leaders](#). “If we’re going to grow it’s going to be because of exports.”

One of the crucial items on the agenda for the leaders’ meeting is reducing barriers to trade and commerce to hasten the flow of goods and services. Obama made strengthening U.S. exports an essential economic objective and he is seeking to double U.S. exports by 2015. This is part of a broad effort to rebalance the U.S. economy from one that is consumer driven to one that is a blend and more likely to weather downturns in the global economy. The United States and most advanced economies are still recovering from the 2007–2009 economic recession that was the most severe since the Great Depression of the early 1930s.

“We represent close to 3 billion people, from different continents and cultures,” [Obama told APEC leaders](#) before a dinner November 12. “Our citizens have sent us here with a common task: to bring our economies closer together, to cooperate, to create jobs and prosperity that our people deserve so that they can provide for their families.”

Obama also stressed in meeting with business executives that the United States is pivoting from a decade focused on post-9/11 conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq to one focused more broadly as a major Asia-Pacific power.

“We’ve turned our attention back to the Asia-Pacific region, and I think that it’s paying off immediately in a whole range of improved relations with countries, and businesses are starting to see more opportunities as a consequence,” Obama said.

A component of that effort is development of the nine-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an initiative to create a free trade agreement among the nations of the Pacific Rim. The TPP nations are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States and Vietnam. Japan also announced it is interested in joining the partnership.

[Negotiators announced November 12](#) that they have reached the broad outlines of a Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement among the nine countries. “We are confident that this agreement will be a model for ambition for other free trade agreements in the future, forging close linkages among our economies, enhancing our competitiveness, benefitting our consumers and supporting the creation and retention of jobs, higher living standards, and the reduction of poverty in our countries,” the group said.

The TPP countries also said country negotiating teams will work out the remaining details of the trade agreement over the next year. Obama said the way ahead will involve some “hard negotiations and some tough work,” adding that the negotiations with South Korea for the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement serve as a model for prioritizing trade with a key partner.

[3. Treasury’s Brainard at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace \(11-11-2011\)](#)

U.S. Department of the Treasury: Opening Remarks by Under Secretary Lael Brainard to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 9, 2011

We saw a quiet but profound shift at the Cannes G-20 Summit back to a unified focus on safeguarding the global recovery as the central priority today. We can see this shift articulated in the action plan that was released, and we expect to see it in policy steps taken by individual countries in the coming weeks and months.

Leaders recognized that we are again facing serious risks to global growth, but the situation is in many respects fundamentally different than the one we tackled during the height of the financial crisis a few years ago. With members of the G-20 now having different degrees of policy space — both monetary and fiscal — and facing differentiated challenges, we are seeking complementarity among differentiated national responses as opposed to a unified response.

So the Cannes Summit was not, and could not have been, like the London Summit of 2009, where the discussion was centered on the necessity for immediate and across-the-board global stimulus. But the focal point of Cannes — like London — was squarely on growth and job creation with the attendant underpinnings of a return to financial stability. There are no “one size fits all” solutions but we made essential progress on a set of steps and tools that will strengthen the recovery and fuel growth over time.

The financial crisis in Europe remains the central challenge to the global economy, which is why the central focus at the summit was on Europe’s comprehensive plan. The world knows that an effective solution for Europe is key to maintaining global growth, and over the past month, European leaders have announced an ambitious plan to deal with the crisis. They have announced their plan to build a firewall to ensure that euro area countries with basically sound policies continue to have access to market financing. They have also declared their determination to

reinforce the capitalization of their banks and ensure access to abundant funding, even as they work to enhance Europe's economic governance. In Cannes, President Obama and Secretary Geithner engaged their counterparts in an effort to help them deliver on these commitments as rapidly and convincingly as possible.

The task ahead now for Europe is to accelerate elaboration and implementation of the firewall and other elements of the comprehensive plan in ways that are grounded in the political and institutional realities of the Euro area. Euro area commitment and euro area resources will be central to the credibility and effectiveness of this endeavor to work. The United States and our international partners will want to stand behind European leaders as they move to put in place a decisive solution.

Here at home, we continue to remain intensely focused on creating new jobs and growing the economy, and we recognize that our growth will also help amplify and lift global growth overall. Our recovery remains fragile and still too vulnerable to events beyond our shores. Pro-growth policies in the near term and meaningful deficit-reduction in the medium term provide the best insurance policy to protect the U.S. recovery from further risks from global markets. To promote near-term growth and job creation, the Obama Administration has put forward a series of American Jobs Act proposals that would put veterans, teachers, and construction workers back on the job, invest in our infrastructure while creating good jobs, and put more money in the pockets of every American worker by cutting their payroll taxes in half.

With demand in the advanced economies expected to remain weak, the emerging markets have a vital role to play in strengthening global growth as they pivot to more domestic-led demand, and this was recognized in Cannes. China and other countries with large surpluses and export-oriented economies agreed to take additional steps to support growth and strengthen demand in their own countries. And for the first time since the G-20 Summit in Toronto, countries, including Germany and Canada, agreed to allow automatic stabilizers to support their economic recovery and introduce additional discretionary measures. Again, while these were understated statements at Cannes, they are vital to the resolving the central growth challenge.

China played a constructive role at the Summit. China memorialized their determination to increase the flexibility of the RMB. This is something we've sought for some time, and it will be critical to boosting growth. They also recognized the critical role of the exchange rate to promote more domestic-led growth, and they signaled their commitment to a slower pace of foreign reserve accumulation and to avoid persistent exchange rate misalignment.

We also saw some important outcomes on financial reform. As the United States enacts financial reform at home with the Dodd-Frank Act, we are moving in lockstep on key conforming reform commitments in the FSB and G-20. The G-20 endorsed new global capital and liquidity standards in November 2010 and a year later in Cannes it adopted higher capital buffers for large banks so that they can withstand future shocks, alongside a new international standard for resolution regimes, so that large cross-border firms can be resolved without the risk of severe disruption or taxpayer exposure to loss.

In addition, we secured agreement in Cannes on two important new initiatives. First, to establish global standards for margins on uncleared derivatives. And second, to establish one global system to uniquely identify parties to financial transactions. These two initiatives will address risks in the system and heighten transparency.

Importantly, there was also a strong recognition and support for the need for sustained development funding and support for the poorest around the world, particularly in the Horn of Africa. We

discussed the need to strengthen food security, address climate change, implement critical infrastructure projects, and maintain our focus on the need to foster growth in the developing world.

I'll conclude by noting the importance of these issues — at the G-20, at APEC, which the U.S. begins hosting today, and via our bilateral channels — for the future economic growth of the United States. President Obama said that the G-20 agenda mirrors our efforts back home — meaning how do we boost growth, how do we shrink our deficits in a way that doesn't slow our recovery, and how we do ensure that our workers are getting jobs, skills and training? The answer goes back to the central imperative of growth. By working with our international partners we can strengthen our growth and we can accomplish more — at home and around the world. Thank you.

4. Clinton Outlines U.S. Policy in East Asia, Pacific (11-10-2011)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says there is a need for a more dynamic and durable relationship across the Asia-Pacific region that features a mature security and economic architecture on a scale that today's challenges demand.

It must feature a structure that promotes prosperity and universal values, effectively resolves differences among nations, fosters trust and accountability and encourages cooperation, Clinton said in a speech at the East-West Center in Honolulu November 10.

The secretary is in Hawaii for meetings that are leading up to the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting being held November 12–13. President Obama arrives in Honolulu November 11 to begin meetings with representatives of nations in the Trans-Pacific Partnership and then attends the APEC CEO Business forum.

“And just as the United States played a central role in shaping that architecture across the Atlantic to ensure that it worked for us and for everyone else, we are now doing the same across the Pacific,” Clinton said. “The 21st century will be America's Pacific Century, a period of unprecedented outreach and partnership in this dynamic, complex and consequential region.”

Clinton said she has heard from her counterparts across the region an urgent desire for American leadership. The alliances the United States has made in the region over the years have helped provide the security that has made it possible for countries throughout Asia to prosper, she said.

“American ships patrol sea lanes and keep them safe for trade. American diplomats help settle disputes among nations before they escalate,” Clinton said. “We've been a major trade and investment partner, a source of innovation, a host to generations of students and a committed development partner, helping to expand opportunity and bring economic and social progress to millions of people.”

Clinton said there are challenges facing the Asia-Pacific now that demand America's leadership, from ensuring open sea lanes to countering North Korea's provocations and proliferation activities to promoting balanced and inclusive economic growth.

“The United States has unique capacities to bring to bear in these efforts and a strong national interest at stake,” Clinton said.

The United States is moving along six lines of action in the Asia-Pacific to strengthen its role and its relationships, she said. Those lines are strengthening individual security alliances with other nations, deepening working relationships with emerging powers, engaging with regional multilateral institutions such as APEC, expanding trade and investment, forging a broad-based military presence and advancing democracy and human rights, she added.

Clinton said she is joining President Obama as he hosts the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in Honolulu, and next week in Indonesia as he becomes the first American president to attend the East Asia Summit. While in Indonesia, Obama will also attend meetings at the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations that are being held at the same time.

The United States will also place special emphasis on engaging with each of its five treaty alliance partners in the Asia-Pacific region, Clinton said.

Finally, Clinton said that economic issues "are front and center" in these relationships, and that American businesses are eager for more opportunities to trade and invest in Asian markets.

[Clinton on America's Pacific Century: A Time of Partnership](#) (11-10-2011)

5. Assistant Secretary Feltman on U.S. Policy on Syria (11-10-2011)

Testimony by Jeffrey D. Feltman, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, Washington, DC, November 9, 2011

Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, Distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss our goals with regard to Syria and the strategy we are implementing to achieve them.

Much has changed both within Syria and in the international response to what is happening inside Syria since the unrest began eight months ago. Protests that started in the provincial village of Dara'a have spread to every city and every major town in the country. The Syrian people have demonstrated an irrepressible hunger for a change in the way their country is governed. They are no longer willing to tolerate the blatant denial of their universal rights and trampling of their dignity. They are no longer willing to remain quiet about the rampant corruption, brutality, and ineptitude of the mafia-like Assad clique that has hijacked the Syrian state and transformed it into an instrument whose sole purpose is to retain power in the hands of a small group of self-interested elites.

The protestors in Syria have overcome the barrier of fear. They are out on the streets of cities and towns all over Syria every single day despite the relentless and indiscriminate violence that the regime has deployed against them. According to the estimates of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, over 3,500 Syrians have been killed since the protests began. Tens of thousands have been detained, and many of those have been tortured. In a report of her findings in August, the High Commissioner noted "a pattern of human rights violations that constitutes widespread or systemic attacks against the civilian population, which may amount to crimes against humanity." The violations included murder, forced disappearances, summary executions, torture, deprivation of liberty, and persecution. But the regime's overwhelming use of force has not been able to suppress the street protests. Peaceful street protestors have passed the point of no return. They will not stop

until Bashar al-Assad and his clique are gone.

The Syrian army has been forced to occupy its own country. Even small towns are continuously occupied by tanks, armored personnel carriers, and battalions of foot soldiers along with plain-clothes intelligence personnel and regime-sponsored armed groups who do much of the dirty work. The pressure is starting to wear on the army. It is not just the fast, unsustainable tempo of operations and unending redeployments ordered to quell every manifestation of dissent – the soldiers of the Syrian army are increasingly rejecting a mission that calls for them to kill and brutally repress their own countrymen, in some cases people from their own tribes and hometowns. Military defections, primarily by conscripts and junior officers, are on the rise, and the pressure on senior officers continues to mount.

The violence is still continuing. In its desperation, the regime is executing a deliberate and bloody strategy of channeling peaceful protest into armed insurrection. It is stoking the fears of Syria's minority communities with blatant propaganda about foreign conspiracies and domestic terrorism while cynically claiming that the regime is their only protection from sectarian violence. Make no mistake: the regime is driving the cycle of violence and sectarianism. The Syrian people are resisting it, but the regime is working diligently to fulfill its own prophecy of inter-communal violence.

Assad and his inner circle know they cannot contain or manage peaceful opposition, so they assault it with violence and with terror. They believe they can handle a violent resistance because violence is a medium they know well. Mass arrests, shabiha thuggery and outright regime violence have forced peaceful protestors to adapt their methods. They now arrange gatherings of smaller groups on short notice and disperse before security forces are able to respond. And as they are literally beaten off the streets, protestors are learning new forms of peaceful resistance such as boycotts and strikes. Security forces have responded to civil disobedience such as last week's general strike in Dara'a with intimidation and vandalism.

While, for the most part, the opposition has thus far refused to be baited into responding with violence, armed resistance to the regime is on the rise, with some taking up arms in self-defense. This is not surprising given that they are faced with increasingly brutal repression and are still denied the political space to organize and make their voices heard peacefully. But it is potentially disastrous to their cause. Forcing the opposition to become violent is the deliberate strategy of the Assad government. The regime is confounded by protestors chanting "peaceful, peaceful" and shopkeepers who shutter their stores in solidarity with those killed and arrested, but it knows precisely how to handle armed insurrection: with brutal and overwhelming force. By working diligently to channel non-violent opposition into a proto-insurgency, the regime seeks to discredit the opposition, scare minorities into submission, unite security forces against a common enemy, fragment international consensus and tear Syria apart along sectarian lines. This must be resisted.

On the economic front, the regime's financial situation is growing increasingly dire. Tough, targeted sanctions from the United States and the European Union have squeezed the regime's cash-flow. Oil revenue, which used to make up about a third of government revenue, is drying up. Europe used to buy more than 90% of Syria's crude. Today it buys none. As a result, the Syrian government has had to dramatically cut oil production. All its storage tanks are filled to capacity. Despite months of desperate efforts to entice potential new buyers with offers of deep discounts, the regime has been unable to find alternative customers.

Meanwhile, we have required U.S. persons to block Syrian regime property and the EU has frozen assets of two Syrian banks for their role in facilitating the regime's access to the international financial system. Even non-U.S. and non-European companies that are not directly affected by our sanctions have come to the conclusion that it is not in their interest to do business with this regime. And it is not just the United States and EU that are tightening the financial noose around the regime. Canada and Japan have deployed sanctions of their own.

But more than sanctions, it is the financial ineptitude of the Syrian government that is driving Syria's economy over a cliff. The Syrian economy was already in a precarious state before this crisis. The regime's mismanagement and attempts to buy its way back into political favor have vastly exacerbated the problem. This is why we have urged our Arab and European partners to increase their pressure on the regime now, before Bashar al-Assad precipitates a complete collapse of the Syrian economy.

Turning to the Syrian opposition, one of the more promising recent developments is the establishment of the Syrian National Council, a coalition including secularists, Christians, Islamists, Druze, Alawis, Kurds and other groups from both inside and outside Syria who have joined together to form a united front against the Assad regime. When you consider that for the past forty years, the Syrian people have been prevented from engaging in any political activity or even political discussion, it is truly remarkable that in a matter of just a few months, the SNC has managed to bring together such a broad array of groups into a united coalition, despite the regime's relentless attempts to thwart their efforts. We have not endorsed any specific opposition group – only the Syrian people can decide who can legitimately represent them. But we take the advent of the SNC very seriously, and we support the broader opposition's efforts to focus on the critical task of expanding and consolidating its base of support within Syria by articulating a clear and common vision and developing a concrete and credible post-Assad transition plan.

There are still many Syrians who, while they are appalled by Bashar al-Assad, see his continued rule as preferable to alternatives they fear will be worse. It is up to the opposition to convince those Syrians that a credible alternative exists and that Assad's departure will not mean chaos, civil war, or a new form of tyranny, but rather a representative, pluralistic, secular and accountable government that will operate by rule of law, respond to the needs of its people, and uphold and protect the rights and interests of all Syrians, regardless of sect, ethnicity, gender or class. The United States understands Syrians will determine their own formula for government by the consent of the governed, but we will not support an outcome that replaces one form of tyranny or repression with another.

We continue to meet regularly with members of the opposition, including, but not exclusively, many SNC members, and we encourage other governments to do the same.

The positions of Syria's neighbors have changed dramatically since March. Whereas, the initial inclination of many leaders in the region was to support Assad as the "devil they knew" and putative guarantor of stability, nearly all of the regional leaders with whom I engage now recognize that Assad and his regime are driving the instability. They recognize that Assad is part of the problem, not the solution and -- some quietly, some not so quietly -- admit to wanting him gone. They recognize that if Assad is allowed to continue, he will precipitate their worst nightmare: the collapse of the Syrian state with violence spilling over into the rest of the region. This crisis could easily spread beyond Syria's borders; Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon already host thousands of refugees.

The Gulf Cooperation Council has described the Syrian regime as a killing machine. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said he believes the opposition will be successful in their "glorious" resistance to the ongoing government crackdown. During a September visit to Libya, he said, "Those who repress their own people in Syria will not survive. The time of autocracies is over. Totalitarian regimes are disappearing. The rule of the people is coming."

The continuous coverage of the Assad regime's brutality in the pan-Arab media has decimated Assad's standing on the Arab street. A recent poll by the Arab American Institute suggests that Assad has become a pariah in the Arab world. The poll, conducted in early October surveyed over 4,000 Arabs in six countries. Just three years ago, a region-wide poll of the same six countries asked respondents to name a leader, not from their own country, that they most respected. Bashar al Assad scored higher than any other Arab head of state. Today, however, the overwhelming majority of Arabs side with those Syrians demonstrating against the government (with support for them ranging from 83% in Morocco to 100% in Jordan). When asked whether Bashar al Assad can continue to govern, the highest affirmative ratings he receives are a mere 15% in Morocco and 14% in Egypt, with the rest in low single digits.

The Arab League has repeatedly condemned the regime's violence and called for a peaceful political solution while insisting that the Syrian regime meet a set of reasonable conditions before any negotiations begin. The League dispatched its Secretary General to Damascus on September 10 and a Ministerial-level delegation on October 26. After strenuous efforts to wiggle out of or dilute the League's conditions, on November 2, the Syrian government accepted the terms of an Arab League plan that includes:

- a cessation of violence,
- the release of political prisoners,
- the withdrawal of security forces from populated areas,
- free access for journalists and Arab League monitors, and
- an Arab League-hosted national dialogue between the Syrian government and the opposition.

We welcome the efforts of the Arab League to stop the Assad regime's assaults on the Syrian people, but success of the Arab League mission will depend not on what the regime says, but on what it does. The regime must comply with each of these obligations fully – not within weeks but within days. It must not be allowed to exploit this process to buy time through half measures, token gestures, and endless discussion of technicalities, while more Syrians are killed and imprisoned. We strongly support free and unfettered access to Arab League monitors throughout Syria, but they should be complemented by internationally recognized professional human rights monitors as well as journalists. Syria needs credible witnesses throughout the country that can document and deter the regime's violent excesses.

As for dialogue, it is up to the opposition to decide whether or not it wishes to discuss with the regime the terms of Syria's transition from dictatorship to democracy. Under no circumstances should a dialogue be a precondition for ending regime violence against Syrian citizens. Nor should the regime be able to dictate which oppositionists should take part in discussions or where those discussions should take place.

Since the Syrian regime "agreed" to the League's conditions on November 2, scores of innocent Syrians have been killed. Security forces remain deployed in most cities and towns. Tanks and artillery continue to fire into residential areas in Homs. Thousands of peaceful protestors remain in detention. Arrests continued unabated. If the regime continues to spurn this most recent "last chance," we hope that the Arab League will take additional, clear measures to express its

condemnation of the Syrian regime and solidarity with the Syrian people while taking a leading role in building international pressure for a political transition in Syria, including at the United Nations.

The topic of Syria is consistently raised in diplomatic conversations with Arab leaders. And in those conversations, almost all the Arab leaders say the same thing: Assad's rule is coming to an end. Change in Syria is now inevitable. It is only a question of how long Assad will fight to hold onto power and how many more innocent Syrians have to die before his rule ends. Some Arab leaders already have begun to offer Assad safe-haven in an effort to encourage him to leave peaceably and quickly.

Iran continues to be complicit in the violence in Syria, providing material support to the regime's brutal campaign against the Syrian people. Cynically capitalizing on the Syrian government's growing alienation from its Arab neighbors, Iran is seeking to increase its influence in Syria and help Assad remain in power as a vital conduit to Hezbollah in Lebanon. But public statements last month by President Ahmadinejad calling for Assad to stop the violence and enact reforms might indicate that even the Iranians doubt the sustainability of Assad's rule. Still, Iran has provided political, financial, and material assistance in support of the regime's brutal crackdown against the Syrian people.

We remain actively engaged in ratcheting up the pressure on Assad bilaterally and multilaterally. Following President Obama's statement on August 18, governments from every continent echoed the President's call for Assad to step aside. Since the beginning of the Syrian unrest, we have pursued targeted financial measures to increase pressure on the Syrian regime and its enablers. We have specifically targeted those responsible for human rights abuses, senior officials of the Syrian government, and the regime's corrupt business cronies. The Executive Order signed by the President in August blocks the property of the Syrian government, bans U.S. persons from new investments in or exporting services to Syria, and bans U.S. imports of, and other transactions or dealings in, Syrian-origin petroleum or petroleum products. These measures represent some of the strongest sanctions the U.S. government has imposed against any country in the world.

In addition, European sanctions banning the purchase of Syrian petroleum products -- the regime's most important source of foreign exchange -- and freezing the assets of select Syrian banks in Europe have had an arguably greater impact given the larger volume of Syrian trade with Europe. We are also working with our international partners, including our Arab allies, to block efforts by the Syrian regime to circumvent American and European sanctions. The United States and European Union will continue to deploy new sanctions against key regime figures, regime enablers (including the regime's corrupt businessmen cronies), and companies and organizations that support the regime. These sanctions include asset freezes and travel bans targeted to affect the regime while sparing the broader economy to the greatest extent possible.

We have led the effort to hold two special sessions of the UN Human Rights Council on the situation in Syria. At the second special session, we worked closely with many of Syria's Arab neighbors, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan, to ensure unified regional condemnation of the Syrian regime and to establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the on-going human rights violations. We expect the Commission of Inquiry to be permitted to carry out its mission without restrictions. We believe that the introduction of more witnesses will play a critical role in proving to the world what is really happening in Syria and mobilizing fence-sitting nations to join us in bringing greater pressure to bear on the regime.

Despite the October 4 veto of the EU-sponsored draft resolution on Syria, we remain committed to pursuing multilateral sanctions at the Security Council. But if Russia and China cynically continue

to stand in the way of international efforts to end the violence in Syria, the United States and other allies of the Syrian people will consider other steps to ensure the Syrian people are protected. The UN is one important channel but not the only one. Nevertheless, we will continue our efforts to convince Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa to change their positions regarding sanctions against Syria, and we will encourage our Arab allies and the Syrian opposition to aggressively engage with those countries as well.

In the meantime, we would suggest that these countries ask and answer some basic questions. Does the regime permit peaceful protest? Does it allow the peaceful opposition to organize, discuss and deliberate without fear of assassination or arrest? Does the regime permit the UN commission of inquiry to enter Syria and do its internationally-mandated work? Does it allow human rights monitors and journalists to witness the situation on the ground? Has the regime met any of its self-imposed deadlines for reform or for ending violence against civilians? The answer to all of these questions is obviously no.

Complementing our international efforts, Ambassador Ford has been doing exceptional work in providing Washington policy makers with a clear perspective of what is happening in Syria. Thank you for confirming him. He has boldly delivered strong messages to the Syrian regime and met repeatedly with opposition figures and civil society. His courageous efforts show our resolve to pressure the Syrian regime to end its senseless killing, demonstrate our solidarity with the Syrian people, and help to shine an international spotlight on the gross abuses of the Assad regime. This Administration's principled stand against Assad's brutality, and the Ambassador's own actions to show solidarity with the Syrian people, have led to attacks and intimidation by the regime against Embassy Damascus and Ambassador Ford himself. He is currently in the United States on leave, and we expect that he will return to his post before long. For as long as we are able, we will maintain an embassy and an ambassador in Damascus. Robert Ford will continue to interact with the Syrian people and the Syrian government.

Overall, the Administration is following a careful but deliberate and principled course. This is necessary given Syria's complex and unique circumstances. We do not seek further militarization of this conflict. Syria is not Libya. Nor, for that matter, is it Tunisia, Egypt, or Yemen. The way forward includes supporting the opposition while working with our international partners to further isolate and pressure the regime through diplomatic and financial means. We will work with the Syrian people and our international partners to do what we must to ensure that Assad and his regime are prevented from murdering Syrian citizens and tearing the Syrian state apart.

The Syrian people are entitled to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, basic rights enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the Syrian republic is a signatory. The Syrian people are seeking a government that abides by these principles, and which governs only with the consent of its citizens. The emergence of such a government in Syria is in the interest of the Syrian people and in the interest of the United States.

We ideally seek a peaceful Syrian-led political transition that includes the end of Bashar al-Assad's rule and the replacement of the corrupt, incompetent and violent regime he built and tolerated with one responsive to the needs of the Syrian people. One thing I have learned from the events of the Arab world in the past year is humility regarding my own ability to predict the outcomes or timelines of these convulsive and transformational processes. I cannot tell you exactly how long it will take to achieve this outcome in Syria. It has the potential to be a long, difficult process, but the sooner the better for Syria and the region.

While the United States sympathizes with Syrian military defectors and average citizens attempting to protect themselves, we urge them to think strategically about how best to accomplish their goals. We still believe that violent resistance is counterproductive. It will play into the regime's hands, divide the opposition, and undermine international consensus against the regime. We urge the opposition, and our regional allies, to continue to reject violence. To do otherwise would, frankly, make the regime's job of brutal repression easier. At the same time, all Syrians must know that they have the support of the international community.

How do we stop spiraling violence? As a means of creating greater protection for civilians, documenting human rights abuses, and ensuring that undecided governments have a clearer view of what is really happening inside Syria, we continue to press for immediate, unfettered, and sustained access for internationally recognized human rights monitors, the UN Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry, and independent journalists. If skeptics on the Security Council still believe Assad's propaganda about armed gangs, let them join the call for monitors and journalists who could prove it. The introduction of credible witnesses throughout Syria would both deter and ensure documentation of the regime's worst excesses. And it would diminish the temptation for protestors to put down their placards and pick up weapons. The Arab League has already insisted that Syria accept monitors as part of its plan to end the violence. The United States strongly supports European-led efforts to introduce a resolution in the UN General Assembly's Third Committee that would insist on the same.

Bashar al-Assad is desperate to convince himself and others that Syria is fine. In the relative calm of central Damascus, he may actually believe it. But when the money runs out, he and his inner circle will be forced to face the desperate reality of their situation and ideally will head for the exits voluntarily.

What we have to say to President Assad can be summed up very briefly: step aside and allow your people to begin the peaceful, orderly transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Bashar al-Assad has proven that he is incapable of reform. Our advice to President Assad is that he leave now. He may want to study the recent examples of other Arab autocrats who have been confronted by populations that have overcome the barrier of fear to demand their universal rights. If Assad truly has Syria's interests at heart, he will leave now. We will relentlessly pursue our two-track strategy of supporting the opposition and diplomatically and financially strangling the regime until that outcome is achieved.
